

## **NATIONAL AERONAUTICS AND SPACE ADMINISTRATION**

This report is NASA's enclosure to the Government-wide "Annual Progress Report on Implementation of Public Law 106-107". This is the third annual progress report to Congress, and covers the period of May 2003 through May 2004. This report covers NASA's efforts to streamline and simplify the award and administration of Federal grants and cooperative agreements in the following areas:

- I Participation in the Government-wide Streamlining and Grants.gov Efforts;
- II Internal Efforts to Create an Environment Conducive to Grants and Cooperative Agreement Streamlining and Simplification, and Assess Impact of Changes;
- III Implementing the Recent Changes Affecting the Pre-Award Process; and
- IV Other NASA Grants and Cooperative Agreements Streamlining and Simplification Efforts.

### **I. Participation in the Government-wide Streamlining and Grants.gov Efforts**

- NASA's Office of Procurement actively participates in the Integrated Acquisition Environment initiatives designed to complement the Agency's IFM systems. These IAE initiatives include FedBizOps, Business Partner Network, and the Federal Procurement Data System (FPDS) - Next Generation. By taking advantage of these and related federal-wide acquisition tools and processes, NASA avoids the duplicative costs of building and maintaining agency-specific systems.
- NASA is an active participant in the Pre-Award Workgroup and has worked with other Federal agencies and OMB to develop uniform administrative rules, a single CFR for all eight existing OMB Circulars, and a subtitle within this CFR for Federal agencies to co-locate their regulations for the award and administration of grants and agreements. The efforts of this workgroup has resulted in the establishment of Title 2 on May 11, 2004 with one subtitle for OMB guidance to Federal agencies and a second subtitle for agencies' regulations implementing the guidance.
- NASA participates in the Grants Networking meetings to share agency information on grant and cooperative agreement processes with other Federal grant and cooperative agreement making agencies.
- NASA is an active participant in the OSTP Research Business Models Subcommittee working group initiative to expand Federal Demonstration Partnership (FDP) Model Terms and Conditions beyond FDP members and FDP agencies. If accepted, this initiative will help improve and extend interagency use of a standard set of grant terms and conditions.

- NASA is a member and a participant in the Federal Demonstration Partnership (FDP). NASA uses this forum to update recipients on NASA policy changes and to discuss recipient concerns. NASA values the feedback it receives from the FDP community and uses this feedback in the formulation of its policies. In response to recipient concerns, NASA has completed several changes to its FDP grant provisions to clarify financial reporting and security requirements, eliminate duplicative reporting requirements, and provide additional information on the internal NASA grant processes.
- NASA attends all Grants.Gov status meetings to stay informed of the progress of this project. We have held meetings with Grants.gov personnel to formulate NASA's strategy for transitioning to full use of Grants.Gov capabilities.

## **II Internal Efforts to Create an Environment Conducive to Grants and Cooperative Agreements Streamlining and Simplification, and Assess Impact of Changes**

### **General Approach**

- The Sponsored Business Research Activity (SRBA) group of the NASA Headquarters Office of Procurement is a dedicated group of acquisition professionals that focus exclusively on grants and cooperative agreements. The SRBA group conducts regular outreach with internal constituencies including the following:
- NASA has an appointed University Liaison and Outreach official within its Office of Education. This official is responsible for spearheading NASA's efforts to create synergy with universities and other educational institutions. This official reviews NASA policies with an eye towards how these policies affect universities with limited grant and cooperative agreement administration resources.
- The NASA Grants Steering Committee, chaired by the SRBA Manager, meets every month to discuss NASA grant and cooperative agreement policies. This committee includes various functional disciplines such as legal, representatives from all of NASA's major programs, education and outreach, and finance. This committee disseminates these updates within their organizations. In the past year, this committee has made significant progress. Achievements include: reviewing the announcement template to add NASA-specific guidance; providing feedback on the SRBA web page; issuing internal instructions on the use of Grants.Gov FIND; an agreement to restructure NASA's application package to be consistent with the Grants.gov application structure; updating guidance on NASA Research Announcements; and reviewing all regulatory changes.
- A teleconference is held every month with Grant Officers from all NASA Centers to discuss Grant Officer concerns and communicate upcoming changes in grant and

cooperative agreement policy. The SRBA group values the input it receives from the Grant Officers in the NASA Field Centers.

- In December of 2003, NASA conducted an agency-wide Procurement Training Conference. The SRBA group took advantage of this opportunity to train Grant Officers and Grant Specialists on all new initiatives, including the: Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS)/Central Contractor Registration requirements (CCR); standardizing certifications and assurances; the Announcement Template; Grants.gov FIND and APPLY; and Title 2 of the CFR. Additionally, each Center conducts training on grant and cooperative agreement-related topics as appropriate.
- SRBA completed its website in February of 2004. This website is a single location for both external and internal constituents to find all NASA grant and cooperative agreement-related information. This website includes links to the following: grant and cooperative agreement-related regulations, NASA Center offices; guidebooks for the preparation of unsolicited proposals and NASA Research Announcements; the Announcement Template; and points of contact. A Frequently Asked Questions feature was added to address issues covering the entire grant and cooperative agreement lifecycle. The user of this site can submit questions that will be addressed to the entire SRBA group. All questions are answered in a timely manner and this site is regularly updated.
- The SRBA group monitors the Center's award and administration of grant and cooperative agreement awards through NASA HQ-directed Procurement Surveys. As part of this process, grant metrics are monitored. The agency standard for the award of grants is 60 days from purchase request receipt to award, and 29 days from complete package to award. NASA is pleased to report that it is meeting, and in most cases bettering, these goals.
- NASA updated its "Guidebook for Proposers Responding to a NASA Research Announcement (NRA)" in January of 2004. This update reflects all new policies including: Grants.Gov FIND, DUNS/CCR requirements, and the standard template. This comprehensive guidebook was written to assist the grant and cooperative agreement community in: (1) responding to NASA solicitations for research; (2) understanding the NASA award process; and (3) adhering to grant and cooperative agreement administration requirements. This guidebook is posted on NASA's Research Opportunities webpage and is updated regularly.
- NASA continues to develop its NASA Shared Services Center (NSSC). The NSSC consolidates targeted activities, (for example, the award of grants), into a separate NASA Center which reports to Headquarters and is designed to achieve: efficient and effective service; improved data quality; standardized processes; leveraged skills and investments; and economies of scale. A draft solicitation was issued in May of 2004. Grants are scheduled to transition to the NSSC in the first quarter of fiscal year 2007.

- NASA is nearing completion of its peer review management system update, known as the NSPIRES system, that will move current peer review and proposal management capabilities from an older server-based system to a full web-based capability with enhanced internal management capabilities. NASA has designated NSPIRES as its back office system link to Grants.Gov, and will test system to system interface capabilities later this year. NASA has developed the system in consultation with the Federal Demonstration Partnership (FDP), and has used FDP members to test and evaluate the system to ensure it will provide significant improvements in ease of use for all those that might access the system. NSPIRES will serve to significantly improve NASA's ability to fully participate in the Grants.gov Apply feature and enhance the internal acceptance of Grants.Gov in the NASA user community.
- NASA is developing a contract writing system as part of its existing Integrated Financial Management (IFM) Program - Contract Management Module to support the creation, editing, execution, administration, distribution, workload management, and federal data reporting requirements of contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements. This contract writing system will help streamline the process for writing and distributing grants and cooperative agreements and create greater consistency across the agency. It is anticipated that this contract writing system will be operational by FY2006.

### **III Implementing the Recent Changes Affecting the Pre-Award Process**

#### **A. Grants.Gov FIND**

- In October of 2003, NASA began using the Grant.Gov FIND module. NASA issued a directive requiring all announcements of grant and cooperative agreement funding opportunities to be synopsisized using the standard set of data elements prescribed by OMB. Currently all eligible NASA funding opportunity announcements are synopsisized at FedGrants.Gov. In addition to issuing a directive, NASA also issued guidance to provide information about Grants.gov FIND and FedGrants.Gov; and to provide instructions on how to prepare a synopsis for transmittal to FedGrants.Gov. The SRBA group used its internal channels of communication (Grants Steering Committee, Grant Officer teleconferences, etc.) to help NASA users learn how to send an accurate and informative synopsis to Grants.Gov.

#### **B. Announcement Template**

- In January of 2004, NASA issued a directive to require and explain the use of the OMB-directed standard announcement template for announcements of grant and cooperative agreement funding opportunities. The announcement template is posted on NASA's SRBA web page for easy access and will shortly be promulgated

into a NASA Procedural Requirements (NPR) document. [NPRs are NASA's "how to" instructions; they provide required procedures to implement NASA policy. NPRs are posted on a NASA Headquarters' web site and their use is required across the agency.]

- NASA conducted training on the use of the template through its internal channels, and the written guidance. The SRBA group responds to NASA inquiries on the use of the template.
- Currently, all grant and cooperative agreement announcements issued use this template. The NASA Headquarters Office of Procurement reviews Headquarters announcements before they are issued to ensure conformance to this template. NASA Headquarters through its Procurement Surveys plans to monitor NASA Center announcements. NASA not only uses this template for its grants and cooperative agreements, but also for NASA Research Announcements.
- The NASA template includes a number of enhancements aimed at assisting the writer of the announcement; for example; standard language was developed on the use of cost sharing requirements; a cross-reference is provided to explain Executive Order 12372; and a Frequently Asked Questions feature is added to explain the use of the template. NASA program managers reported that the template was easy to use and appreciated the use of standard language and cross-references throughout the document. The NASA Office of Education reported that this template was very useful and reflected their unique requirements.

### **C. The Grants.gov Portal for Electronic Applications**

- NASA is an active participant in the Research and Related Standard Form 424 Workgroup for Grants.Gov APPLY. NASA's primary mission involves research and development. Along with other federal agencies that have significant research missions, we recognized the need for a standard set of application information that would serve the unique requirements of research agencies. The R&R 424 workgroup has developed a standard set of data elements for Grants.gov research and development announcements. NASA will use the R&R 424 form set as its standard for its Grants.gov application packages with only minimal additions allowed to accommodate NASA-specific data needs.
- NASA has provided its Ramp Up schedule to Grants.Gov; will be submitting Agency-specific requirements to Grants.gov for approval and forms development; and has begun internal planning for its system to system test with Grants.Gov.
- In January of 2004, NASA updated its policy on the DUNS and CCR in preparation for NASA integration with Grants.Gov. This new policy requires that all announcements for grants and cooperative agreements include a requirement for the applicant to (1) submit their DUNS number on the Cover Sheet of their proposal,

and (2) register in the CCR and obtain a Commercial And Government Entity (CAGE) Code prior to proposal submission. (Previously, applicants completed these requirements prior to award.) This policy permits NASA's NSPIRES system to register users with the data already provided in the CCR database, and helps expedite the time needed to process grant and cooperative agreement awards. Detailed instructions for obtaining a DUNS number and registering in the CCR are posted on the SRBA web page and the guidebook for NASA Research Announcements.

### **III. Other NASA Grants and Cooperative Agreements Streamlining and Simplification Efforts**

- The E-Government Act of 2002 mandates that agencies publish summaries of R&D awards. NASA directed the development of an automated Abstract Collection and Transmittal System (ACTS) system to collect abstracts directly from R&D contractors and recipients of grants and cooperative agreements. NASA was in the vanguard of government efforts to improve the collection and availability of research abstracts to government program managers. Based on public input, however, NASA has decided to incorporate this abstract collection capability into the NSPIRES system as a fully automated capability requiring no separate input action by the research grant recipient community. This capability will be fully compatible with proposals submitted through the Grants.gov APPLY feature.
- In order to facilitate a better understanding of NASA-supported research, NASA's Office of Biological and Physical Research develops comprehensive publications called Program Tasks and Bibliography each year. These "Task Books", one for each research program area, include descriptions of all peer-reviewed projects, or tasks, funded by OBPR during all or part of a particular fiscal year. These publications have been an important source of information about NASA-funded research, providing users such as NASA program managers and scientists, funded investigators, peer reviewers of NASA grant and cooperative agreement proposals, the scientific community, and the Congress an up-to-date account of selected NASA research. NASA is currently working with its other research program offices to standardize its internal process for issuing Task Books, and provide enhanced "Task Book" management capabilities through the NSPIRES system.
- In March 2004, NASA's OBPR released the FY 2004 "Living" Task Book. Prior to the FY 2004 Task Book release, Principal Investigators used to be required to update their respective Task Book entries on an annual basis in addition to submitting their Technical Reports (Progress and Final) on the anniversary date of the award (usually with independent due dates). The FY2004 Task Book combines the requirements of these two reports into one report with a single submittal date. The new approach eases the administrative burden on the Principal Investigators and retains the benefits of the compiled Task Book research information. NASA also plans to increase communication with the Principal Investigator and all

interested grant and cooperative agreement parties by creating automatic “Report Due” and “Report Received” notifications. All reports will be posted on the Task Book web site as soon as all data submitted is reviewed and approved by all interested grant and cooperative agreement parties, thus improving the quality of Task Book reports and bibliographies. Technical Reports will be made accessible (only to NASA personnel) through one central database, and this capability will be fully integrated into the NSPIRES system.